

The Design Elements of Art

The design elements are those basic items that together serve to compose all the things that we see. While they may be thought of as separate entities, line can most certainly produce shape, and be graded in such method as to simulate the movement of texture and form. Color may also suggest effects of line, texture, shape, and space. In any event, all given objects may employ all of several of the elements, or may emphasize one or two.

Get to know and understand the elements of art so that you may appreciate the visual arts and, also creatively use them in design.

Line

.... is a mark made by a tool - brush, pencil, stick, pen, etc. and is often defined as a moving dot. It can vary in width, direction, curvature, length, and even color.

It is also an element of graphic expression that can lead the eye, define shape, develop symbols and patterns, and indicate different directions such as horizontal, oblique, and vertical.

Shape

.... is an area that is contained within an implied line, or is seen and identified because of color or value changes. Shapes have two dimensions, length and Width. The 2D external appearance and can be positive (area within a defined object) or negative (area around defined objects).

Form

.... Shape and form have the same qualities except shape is two dimensional and form is three dimensional; it describes volume and mass. Both may be organic, freeform or geometric, natural or man-made.

Color

.... is a result of reflection of light by a surface. The whiter the light, the more true the color will be. Hue, value, and intensity are the three main characteristics of color.

Value

.... The relative degree of light or dark, the characteristic of color determined by light or dark, or the quantity of light reflected by the color.

Texture

.... The surface character of a material that can be experienced through touch or the illusion of touch. Texture is produced by natural forces or through an artist's manipulation of the art elements. (such as rough, smooth, furry, etc.)

Space

.... Actual space is a three dimensional volume that can be empty or filled with objects. It has width, height, and depth. Space in a painting is an illusion that creates a feeling of depth. The object or the picture plane is divided into positive space (the object itself) and the negative space (the surrounding area).

The Principals of Design

Balance

.... is the distribution of visual weight in a work of art that creates a feeling of equilibrium in a composition: symmetrically (equal balance); or asymmetrically (unequal).

Contrast

.... is the difference in values, colors, textures, shapes, and other elements. Contrasts create visual excitement and adds interest to the work. If all the art elements - value, for example are the same, the result is monotonous and unexciting.

Emphasis

.... is used by artists to create dominance and focus in their work. Artists can emphasize color, value, shapes, or other art elements to achieve dominance. Various kinds of contrast can be used to emphasize a center of interest.

Movement

.... is used by artists to direct viewers through their work, often to a focal area. Such movement can be directed along the lines and edges; also by way of shapes and colors within the works. Movement is directed most easily on paths of equal value.

Pattern

.... uses the art elements in planned or random repetitions to enhance surfaces of paintings or sculptures. Patterns often occur in nature, and artists use similar repeated motifs to create pattern in their work. Pattern increases visual excitement by enriching surface interest.

Rhythm

.... Is the repetition of visual movement - colors, shapes, or lines. Variety is essential to keep rhythms exciting and active, and to avoid monotony. Movement and rhythm work together to create the visual equivalent of a musical beat.

Unity

.... is the overall effect or grouping of various elements into a related whole. It provides the cohesive quality that makes an artwork feel complete and finished.